CHAPTER VI.

VILLAGE OFFICERS.

To complete the official chain that connects Government with the ryot, we have now only to mention the village officers, that is, under our Government, the Patel, Koolkurnee or Tulatee, and Mhar. Of these the Patel is the chief, as is shown by the name generally given him in the works of English writers the "headman of the village." Elphinstone says: "The Patels are the most important functionaries in the villages, and perhaps the most important class in the country. They hold their office by a grant from the Government (generally that of the Moguls), are entitled in virtue of it to lands and fees, and have various little privileges and distinctions, of which they are as tenacious as of their land. Their office and emoluments are hereditary and saleable with the consent of Government, but are seldom sold except in cases of extreme necessity. The Patel is head of the police and of the administration of justice in his village, but he need only be mentioned here as an officer of revenue. In that capacity he performs on a small scale what a Mamlutdar or a Collector does on a large * * ; he collects the revenue for Government from all the ryots, conducts all its arrangements with them, and exerts himself to promote the cultivation and the prosperity of the village. Though originally the agent of the Government, he is now looked on as equally the representative of the ryots, and is not less useful in executing the orders of the Government than in asserting the rights, or at least in making known the wrongs, of the people.

"The Patel's respectability and influence in his village must be kept up by allowing him some latitude both in the expenditure of the village expenses and in restraining petty disorders within his village. So far from wishing that it were possible for the European officers to hear all complaints on such subjects, I think it fortunate that they have not time to investigate them, and think it desirable that the Mamlutdars also should leave them to the Patels, and thus preserve a power on the aid of which we must in all branches of the

Government greatly depend. Zealous coöperation of the Patels is as essential to the Collector of revenue and to the administration of civil justice, as to the Police, and it ought therefore by all means to be secured. Too much care cannot be taken to prevent their duty becoming irksome, and their influence impaired by bringing their conduct too often under the correction of their superiors. I would lend a ready ear to all complaints against them for oppression. I would not disturb them for inattention to forms, and I would leave them at liberty to settle petty complaints their own way, provided no serious punishments were inflicted on either party * * . If we once destroy our influence over the Patels or theirs over the people we can never recover either."

Though it is not absolutely necessary that the Patel should be able to read and write, and frequently not possible to get one who can, yet whenever practicable this amount of education should be insisted on.

The village Accountant, who is almost always a Brahman, keeps the numerous records and accounts of the village. The watan of Koolkurnee does not exist in many villages, and even in some whole districts. In this case the appointment of a stipendiary officer is necessary, who is called a Tulatee. A greater degree of education and intelligence is exacted from Tulatees than from Koolkurnees, and they are more completely under the control of their superiors, and for these reasons many district officers prefer the administration of villages by Tulatees to that by Koolkurnees. But the Tulatee often has three or four villages, or in wild districts even eight or ten, in his charge, and so cannot give the same attention to them, nor can he be expected to take the same interest in them as the hereditary Koolkurnee of a single village often does. Thus the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems are pretty well balanced.

The office of Tulatee does not unfortunately qualify for pension in the same way as the service of Karkoons does.

The Mhar is the menial servant of the village.

"The most important revenue duty of the Mhar is to watch over the boundaries both of the village lands and of each individual's field, and to give evidence in cases where they are disputed: he watches over crops, whether cut or growing, as long as they are in the fields. He is also the public messenger and guide."—(*Elphinstone.*)

In some districts where there are no Mhars the watans are held, and most of the duties performed by men of other castes, Kolis, Ramosis, &c.

With regard to the collection of the revenue it need only be added that the Patel, and (in some instances) the village Accountant, receives it from the ryots. The Accountant enters it in the Government books and gives the ryots their receipts, and the Mhar carries it to the Mamlutdar's treasury. Similarly, whatever happens in a village of a nature requiring that it should be made known to Government, it is the Patel who inquires into it and makes the report, which the Koolkurnee writes and the Mhar carries to the Mamlutdar. Returns made from the village to the Mamlutdar (a list of which will be found in Hope's Manual) are generally in the name of the Patel though the Koolkurnee writes them.

The village system exists most vigorously in the Deccan, where every village has its full complement of Wuttundars. In the Coast districts generally it has not been so well preserved: in Canara there are no hereditary village officers at all; in Guzerat no watans of Mhars and but few of Koolkurnees; in the Khotee districts of the Southern Konkan few Wuttundars of any sort; and in the Northen Konkan no Koolkurnees, and but few inferior Wuttundars. But everywhere under our Government there is for every village, either hereditary or stipendiary, a Patel, an Accountant, and a menial servant.

1. **Duties of Patels.**—Patels and Koolkurnees are not prohibited, as stipendiary servants are, from lending money to, or trading with, the ryots of their own or other villages, but abuse of authority to ensure payment of a debt, and dereliction of duty as a servant of Government with a view of enabling a debtor to obtain the means of paying his debt, can always be punished.—*G. R. No.* 8960, *Sept.* 8, 1851.

2. It is unquestionably the duty of Patels to render every assistance to travellers, whether official or otherwise, provided payment is duly tendered, otherwise it would be impossible for Europeans not holding the position of a Collector and Magistrate to travel about the districts. A Patel whose character for incivility and obstructiveness was established was accordingly dismissed.—*G. R. No.* 1286, *April* 12, 1866.

3. The prompt relief of shipwrecked persons is considered to be part of the duty of Patels in coast villages. Two Police Patels were dismissed the Government service for refusing food, water, and assistance to a shipwrecked crew.—*G. R. No.* 2169, *July* 7, 1869.

4. It is the duty of Patels and Accountants to protect trees which are the property of Government without extra remuneration. —*G. R. No.* 2731, *May* 5, 1876.

5. **Residence.**—Patels are required (with the same exceptions as apply to village accountants) to reside in the villages they represent (see Order No. 10).—*G. R. No.* 8, *Jan.* 3, 1865.

6. **Matadars.**—It is a mistake to suppose that the only duty of a Matádár (in Guzerát) is to sign village papers. He has to assist in the examination of boundary marks and field inspection of all descriptions, and to satisfy himself of the correctness of all the field statements, &c., which he signs.—*G. R. No.* 2677, *April* 27, 1877.

7. **Efficiency of Tulatees.**—Village Accountants may almost be considered the mainspring of the revenue administration, and it is of great importance that their efficiency should not be impaired by injudicious treatment. Cumulative or daily recurring fines are not to be imposed by Assistant Collectors on either Patels or Accountants without the Collector's special permission.—*G. R. No.* 2519, *May* 3, *and No.* 5739, *Sept.* 13, 1873.

8. **Promotions.**—It is important that no means should be omitted for distinguishing the merit and stimulating the honest ambition of village Accountants. It might be useful to introduce a classified list for the record of their attainments and character, and Assistant Collectors should be urged to pay great attention to this. It would be well occasionally to have recourse to this list on the occurrence of vacancies in the talooka establishments, since no education would lay a better foundation for the eventual discharge of the highest duties in the Revenue Department than that obtained in the office of a village Accountant.*—*Rev. Com. Cir. No.* 915, *July* 29, 1844.

9. There is no objection to promoting Tulatees to the regular pensionary establishment when above the age of twenty-five, provided they entered the Government service before that age.—*G. R. Nos.* 3286, *Sept.* 10, *and* 3723, *Oct.* 18, 1873.

* The recommendation in this order as to lists and promotion is now generally in force.

10. **Residence.**—As a rule it is necessary that village Accountants should reside in the village or one of the circle of villages to which they stand appointed. Exceptions may be made in the case of small outlying villages where there is no house accommodation, and where the emoluments are trifling. It is in the discretion of the Collector to make these exceptions.—*G. R. No.* 3005, *June* 23, 1870.

[*Note.*—Under G. R. No. 5698 of September 30, 1881, para. 15, it is doubtful whether Collectors still possess this discretion.]

11. Koolkurnees and Tulatees are to prepare the Jummabundy papers at their own villages, and are not to be required to attend at the talooka kutcherries unnecessarily nor detained there for long periods.—*G. R. No.* 2682, *June* 26, 1852, *and No.* 3107, *July* 24, 1855.

12. **Alienated villages.**—The Wuttundar Koolkurnees in alienated villages are required to keep regular accounts, as in Government villages.—*G. R. No.* 2390, *May* 23, 1845.

13. **Qualifications.**—Assistant and Deputy Collectors in charge of talookas are to satisfy themselves that Koolkurnees and Tulatees know the rules and orders about the examination of boundary marks previous to appointment.—*G. R. No.* 3367, *June* 13, 1873.

[*Note.*—Under G. R. No. 8805, December 15, 1882, Wattandar Kulkarnis have now to pass an examination.]

14. **Pensions.**—Tulatees and other inferior servants who can only get invalid pensions after 35 years' service should be treated with consideration, and allowed, so far as is consistent with the needs of the service, to continue till entitled to pension.—*G. R. No.* 2788, *Sept.* 14, 1874.

[N.B.—The pension can now be obtained after 30 years' service—*Civ. Pen. Code, V. Edn.*, §§ 89 & 117.]

15. **Allowances.**—Tulatees when they are deputed on duty out of their own talookas receive batta at the regular rates, in addition to ordinary salary. They also receive allowances when placed in charge of the duties of a fellow-tulatee.—*G. of I. No.* 2742, *Nov.* 25, 1876; *G. G. Nov.* 30, 1876; *and G. R. No.* 2536, *May* 31, 1877.

16. **Security.**—No security is to be taken from Patels or Koolkurnees who hold office hereditarily, or who are members of the wuttun, nor from any whose emoluments are less than Rs. 10 a month.—*G. R. No.* 2036, *May* 20, 1869.

17. The security to be furnished by tulatees is now provided for under para. II.-2 of the Rules under S. 214, Land Revenue Code.

18. **Leave.**—An officiating village officer must apply to the Mamlutdar or Mahalkary for leave, and if it be for any period short of three months, he may appoint a deputy to act for him, subject to approval. If he goes on leave for more than three months and less than a year, the sharers should be called on to appoint a deputy. Leave for more than a year will, as a rule, vacate the office, but special exceptions may be allowed to this.—*G. R. No.* 7724, *Oct.* 22, 1850, *and No.* 595, *May* 20, 1867.

19. **Sales of land.**—The Patel, Koolkurnee, and Mhar are required to attend all sales of land in execution of decrees that may take place in their village.—*G. R. No.* 2342, *July* 26, 1841.

20. **Trigonometrical Survey stations.**—Village officers are put in charge of the stations of the Great Trigonometrical Survey, and are to furnish annual reports of their state of repair to the Mamlutdars.—*G. R. No.* 650, *Feb.* 21, 1866.

21. **Property attached.**—When property is under attachment by the revenue authorities, the Patel is to give a certificate stating this and the amount of the Government demand, if a warrant of attachment against the same property is brought from a Civil Court.—*G. R. No.* 6711, *Dec.* 13, 1873.

22. **Grant of offices.**—Lapsed hereditary offices may, with the sanction of Government, be bestowed on properly qualified public servants as rewards for meritorious service.—*G. of I. No.* 56, *April* 26, 1841.

23. **Mhars.**—Among the other duties of Mhars is the disposal of the carcasses of animals that die in the village, which they receive as their perquisite. The complaint is often made that the Mhars poison the cattle for the sake of their skins. This is a charge that is very difficult to prove; but in cases where the suspi-

cion against the Mhars seem strong, they should not be allowed the carcasses.—*G. R. No.* 2459, *Dec.* 14, 1846.

[It frequently happens that village Mhars petition against the villagers for the payment of their customary dues (hukks). Formerly there was no legal way of settling disputes on this subject, so that if efforts to arrange a compromise failed, the parties could only be referred to the Civil Courts. But under Sec. 18 of the Watan Act of 1874 a punchayet may be appointed to settle the matter.]

Owing to the great majority of village offices being watans, the appointment and emoluments of village officers are matters of some complication. The details relating to those points, as well as to their dismissal, the watans themselves, and many other matters, will be found in the chapter on Service Inams.